1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

In the chapter on marriage we saw how the elders had to witness the betrothal ceremonies, and how the *panchayats* deal with cases of divorce and elopement. It may be added that among the Hill Marias the clan-headman, like the *Sendhia* of the Chanda Marias, gets certain traditional fees which the parties have to pay in addition to the compensation which the *panchayat* may award to the injured parents or husband, or to the cost of the tribal feast; at every marriage in Kutru and Bhairamgarh Mar the clan-headman gets a fee of eight annas; when a *panchayat* has settled the compensation to be given to the first husband by the man with whom his wife has eloped, the old and the new husband have each to pay the clan-headman four annas. But the latter is expected not to retain the whole of his fee-income, but to divide it with the headmen of the villages of his clan who have assisted in the ceremony or *panchayat*.

I have already described on page 246 above, the ordeal to which the Gume Hill Maria clan *panchayat* in 1929 subjected a Toinar youth accused of incest with a girl of his clan. How far the ordeal survives in the remotest parts of the State I cannot say; naturally instances of its use very seldom come to light. There is reason to believe that ordeals of this kind were a regular feature of the 'justice' administered by bygone Chiefs and zamindars of Bastar, rather than a product of aboriginal thought; compare the account of the settlement of the Kudmer-Jatalur land dispute at page 96 above. Ordinarily, however, the *panchayats* follow no regular procedure beyond hearing the parties and their friends as informally as possible and deciding the case then and there after free discussion among themselves.

Questions of property seldom arise among the Hill Marias, there being obviously so little scope for dispute when 95 per cent. of the cultivation is shifting cultivation of hillsides regarded as the property of the clan and not of the individual, and when the village site is shifted at least every six years. Sons after marriage live in a separate portion of the long-house of their father or uncle, if there is space for adding a portion for them, or else build a separate house as close as possible; when next the village is shifted there is ample space for all to live in separate houses under one long-house roof. Questions of inheritance of houses therefore arise only when, as among the Bison-horn Marias, villages have become permanent and are not shifted at regular intervals. Even here, however, there are few disputes. The little value set on houses is shown by the fact that it is generally the youngest son who lives on in the father's house after his death, as probably his elder brothers will have married long before him and built separate houses for themselves on marriage. There is among the Bison-horn Marias a vague right to demand

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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691 421 partition of a father's property when a son sets up house for himself, but although he can press for his share, it is felt by the community to be against tribal spirit, rather than unfilial. When, on the other hand, a father had outraged tribal feelings by seducing his sons' wives and driving his sons from his house, his refusal to let his sons have any share in the family property was considered by the Bison-horn Marias an additional justification for his subsequent murder by his sons.

691 428 768 There is so little domestic property of great value among the Hill Marias, and so many of a man's few tools and possessions, as we have seen, are buried with him, that inheritance disputes about movable property are almost unknown. Though among the Bison-horn Marias less is buried or burned with the dead, the remaining movable property generally passes with the house; if the elder sons have set up separate establishments in their father's lifetime they will have equipped themselves with the few possessions they need, and will not worry about the younger brother appropriating what their father has left. Women's ornaments generally are buried or burned with them.

428 When the inheritance includes valuable rice-lands, they remain generally the joint property of the sons and brother's sons, and the father's surviving brothers, the eldest son generally nominally being the manager, though he will certainly have to give way to an uncle or younger brother or cousin if he is inefficient, weak-minded or deformed. The produce will be stored in his granary, but shared among the members of the family.

428 736 587 Daughters and sisters have no right of inheritance of their father's or brothers' lands or property. For the land is really the land of the clan, and the daughters and sisters will on marriage have passed to the clans of their husbands. A widow is entitled only to maintenance, and as on her husband's death she very often becomes the wife of his younger brother, she gets her maintenance as a matter of course; if he leaves no younger brother and she does not marry again, she lives on in her late husband's house and works with other women of the family, and is maintained by their husbands. A girl whose parents die before she is married frequently goes to a married sister's house and becomes a co-wife.

562 For a woman on the whole is a kind of property, or a valuable adjunct to the house and family. For her, the husband's family has had to pay a bride-price that is a severe tax on its resources[1]; or else, where cross-cousin marriage prevails,[2] she represents the repayment of a debt incurred when her father took his bride from

[1] See pp. 248-50 and 252-3 above.
[2] See pp. 234 and 247 above.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
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535 but with a great variety of turns and changes: the 'bison'
585 charge and fight each other, pick up rings or leaves on the points of their horns, and chase the girl dancers. The girls, each with a dancing-stick in her right hand, form a long line and go round and through the men dancers with many different movements and steps. They do not usually sing, and, indeed the tune would be lost in the thunder of the drums. As they go, they beat the ground with their sticks *dum-dum-dum, di-dum, dum-dum.* Masked mummers, clowns dressed in straw, naked acrobats with enormous imitation genitalia, add to the gaiety of the scene. There is no finer dance in India.

293 The head-dress of bison horns is the chief treasure of a Maria home. It is kept with the utmost care, dismantled, in closed bamboo baskets, and it takes nearly an hour to assemble it. Horns are rare nowadays in Bastar and have to be imported from Jeypore. A Maria may give a bull in exchange for a pair of good horns; they should be white at the bottom turning to black half way up.

A bamboo frame forms the base of the head-dress. The horns are attached to the front and a great tuft of feathers rises behind. Cloth, often old and costly silk, is tied round and round and a tail hangs down behind. Across the front a fringe of cloth adorned with cowries covers the dancer's eyes.

The feathers used are those of the peacock and of domestic
[237] cocks specially castrated for the purpose. It is considered
[787] unlucky for a feather to fall to the ground during a dance, and before they begin the dancers address the Earth Mother and the Ancestors: 'Save us from the dangers of magic and let none of the feathers fall'.

428 A man's head-dress passes to his son or brother's son after
682 his death. His bow and arrow and his drum are also heir-
762 looms and are highly valued. The loss of a head-dress drove one Maria youth to suicide, and a dispute about possession of an outfit of buttocks-bells led another to murder.

184 In the north of the area, many Maria dance both with bison
535 horns and in Hill Maria fashion. The latter wear the skirt, decorated cap and streamers, and buttocks-bells characteristic of the Abujhmar Hills.

534 The Maria are not very good at musical instruments. They use a small fiddle called *kikir*, a Jews-harp made of iron or

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CAUSES OF CRIME: DISPUTES ABOUT PROPERTY

I

674 In Europe, and indeed wherever modern civilization has made its way, the great majority of murders are murders for gain. Among the Maria also many acts of violence arise in sequel to disputes about property. But there is a great difference between Maria homicide and civilized murder with this motive.

422 How few are the possessions of the Maria! There are 428 some little huts of mud and thatch, some weedy cattle, land which is ultimately the property of the State, a few knives and axes, some pots, perhaps a store of grain and a handful of rupees hidden somewhere. When a man dies, questions of inheritance only rarely arise, for after a few valuables have been buried in the grave there is hardly anything left to distribute. Rules of inheritance do, however, exist. After the death of a father his fields are jointly owned by his sons, his brothers and his brothers' sons. Widows and daughters do not usually inherit, though there are a few examples where there is either no obvious rival claimant or the widow is of strong character and has refused to hand over the property of her dead husband to anyone else.

578 428 Quarrels more often arise over the partition of the family goods while the head of the household is alive. The traditional idea was clearly not to partition the family property during the father's lifetime. But nowadays elder sons often desire a share of land or cattle when they set up a separate establishment. Brothers who, after the death of their father, have shared his possessions sometimes quarrel with one another, and desire a formal separation and partition. Where such partition is permitted in the father's lifetime the youngest son, who often remains at home when the older boys go away to live elsewhere, has a special claim over his father's remaining goods.

674 Murders connected with property are not generally